



# U.S. Department of Labor Compliance Assistance

*Our Commitment to America's Employers and Workers*

## Frequently Asked Questions About the Compliance Assistance Initiative

### ★ What is the Compliance Assistance Initiative?

The Compliance Assistance Initiative is a U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) effort to help America's employers and workers understand how to comply with the federal employment laws it administers. As part of this initiative, Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao created the Office of Compliance Assistance Policy (OCA). This office raises awareness of the laws and regulations DOL enforces and guides people to the information and assistance they need to comply with them. The office is also working with other DOL agencies to better coordinate and leverage their various outreach efforts to better serve the regulated community.

### ★ Why did the Department of Labor launch the effort?

DOL administers more than 180 laws, and it recognizes that many of America's business owners and employees face difficulties comprehending them. In response, DOL launched the Compliance Assistance Initiative to help employers and employees better understand how to comply with federal employment laws and regulations. The goal of this effort is to protect the wages, health benefits, retirement security, safety and health of America's workforce by preventing employment law violations. DOL seeks to meet this goal by providing the business community with easy-to-access compliance assistance tools and resources.

### ★ What specific compliance assistance tools are available?

- ★ The Department's **Toll-Free Help Line (1-866-4-USA-DOL)** provides timely and accurate responses to customer inquiries, and fulfills print and publication requests. It offers live operator assistance in English and Spanish with additional service in more than 140 languages.
- ★ The most widely used compliance assistance tool is **DOL's Web site**. In particular, the public can access a wide range of information on DOL's rules and regulations at any time by visiting **[www.dol.gov/compliance](http://www.dol.gov/compliance)**. This Web site is a gateway to DOL agencies' compliance assistance information.
- ★ DOL also offers a number of innovative e-tools, including the **elaws Advisors** (Employment Laws Assistance for Workers and Small Businesses). The **elaws Advisors** simulate the interaction an individual might have with a DOL regulatory expert by generating answers based on the user's responses to a set of questions. At **[www.dol.gov/elaws](http://www.dol.gov/elaws)**, one can find more than 20 Advisors on various topics including the Family and Medical Leave Act, child labor rules and regulations under the Fair Labor Standards Act, reemployment rights for National Guard and Reservists on active duty, retirement savings, and various safety and health standards.
- ★ The **Employment Law Guide**, which describes DOL's major statutes and regulations in plain language, targets those employers needing introductory information to develop wage, benefit, safety and health, and nondiscrimination policies. It is available in print and online, in both English and Spanish. Call **1-866-4-USA-DOL** to request a free copy, or download a **Guide** by visiting **[www.dol.gov/asp/programs/guide.htm](http://www.dol.gov/asp/programs/guide.htm)**.

  
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## ★ Who benefits from the Compliance Assistance Initiative?

DOL's efforts serve both employers and employees. For example, an employer can call DOL's Toll-Free Help Line or visit the **elaws Advisors** Web site to learn whether the time her employees spend in training is considered hours worked. Likewise, an employee can determine whether he can take leave to care for an ill family member under the Family and Medical Leave Act.

## ★ How does the Compliance Assistance Initiative affect enforcement of DOL's laws and regulations?

These compliance assistance efforts do not replace, or in any way detract from, strong enforcement of DOL's laws and regulations. Rather, compliance assistance complements enforcement by allowing DOL to dedicate its enforcement resources on the relatively small percentage of employers who ignore their responsibilities.

## ★ What exactly are elaws Advisors? Are they live human beings?

No. The **elaws Advisors** are e-tools that simulate an interaction with an employment law expert. Users simply visit [www.dol.gov/elaws](http://www.dol.gov/elaws) to locate an Advisor that will address their questions. The system generates appropriate answers based on the user's responses to a set of questions. In essence, each Advisor is a topic-specific tutorial that clarifies complex issues about one's workplace and employment situation.

## ★ If a business owner calls the Toll-Free Help Line or accesses DOL's Compliance Assistance Web site, will he or she become a target for investigation by DOL?

Absolutely not. The information provided by an individual will be kept confidential within the bounds of the law. For the limited purpose of responding to the inquiry it may be necessary to obtain some identifying information. However, DOL agency staff handling and responding to compliance assistance inquiries are required to maintain the confidentiality of any caller's identifying information. Compliance assistance inquiries shall not trigger an inspection, audit, investigation, etc. However, such inquiries will not protect a party from an inspection, audit, investigation, etc. that is the result of ordinary agency operations.

## ★ Are DOL spokespeople available to discuss the new compliance assistance efforts? To whom should media direct their inquiries?

DOL's Office of Compliance Assistance Policy is happy to discuss this important workforce initiative. For more information, or to request an interview, please contact:

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## Office of Compliance Assistance Policy

[www.dol.gov/compliance](http://www.dol.gov/compliance)

In November of 2002, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) created the Office of Compliance Assistance Policy, which is charged with raising public awareness of the laws enforced by DOL. It also works to ensure that America's employers and employees know where to go for help in complying with these laws. Working with other DOL agencies, the office develops and implements DOL-wide education and marketing plans and promotes new strategies for assisting the regulated community. In addition, it oversees the development and expansion of DOL's compliance assistance resources – especially technology-based tools – and institutes programs to increase DOL employees' awareness and understanding of all DOL laws.

Since its inception, the Office of Compliance Assistance Policy has spearheaded a variety of efforts to raise awareness of America's employment laws and make complying with them easier. These enhanced compliance assistance activities are designed to protect the wages, health benefits, retirement security, safety and health of America's workforce by preventing employment law violations. Compliance assistance focuses on increasing voluntary compliance with the Department's laws, allowing DOL to focus enforcement resources on the small percentage of employers who choose not to comply.

### ★ Leadership

#### **Barbara Bingham**

*Director, Office of Compliance Assistance Policy*

Barbara Bingham is the Director of DOL's Office of Compliance Assistance Policy. Before assuming this position, Ms. Bingham was the acting Director of Regulatory Policy in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy, where she provided counsel to the Assistant Secretary on key policy issues, including DOL regulations and agency compliance assistance plans. She managed the Department's central policy-making body and the preparation of DOL's Semiannual Regulatory Agenda. Ms. Bingham has been instrumental in the design and implementation of several of DOL's most successful compliance assistance tools, and she has led the Department's efforts to make its statutory, regulatory and compliance assistance information available online at [www.dol.gov/compliance](http://www.dol.gov/compliance). Prior to joining the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Ms. Bingham worked at the Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

To learn more about DOL's Office of Compliance Assistance Policy and its latest tools and outreach strategies, or to arrange an interview with Barbara Bingham, please contact:

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